

VZCZCXRO5525
RR RUEHDBU RUEHPW RUEHSL
DE RUEHBUL #3639/01 3160414
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 120414Z NOV 09
FM AMEMBASSY KABUL
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 3040
INFO RUCNAFG/AFGHANISTAN COLLECTIVE
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH 4317

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 003639

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/10/2019

TAGS: [ENRG](#) [SENV](#) [EINV](#) [EAID](#) [PREL](#) [AF](#)

SUBJECT: Trans-boundary Water Issues: The Way Forward in Afghanistan

REF: A. KABUL 2933

[1](#)B. TASHKENT 1513

Classified By: Acting CDDEA Robert F. Cekuta for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: As senior Afghan officials continue calling publicly for large dam and hydropower projects, Afghanistan's downstream neighbors -- Iran, Pakistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan -- are watching carefully, concerned that Afghan actions could affect their water inflow and economic stability. The multilateral Water Sector Donors Group is focused on ways to build Afghan government capacity to gather and share water data, and to build trust with neighboring countries to enter into water rights negotiations with Afghanistan. Paragraph 8 outlines steps we can take to support this effort, including through boosting Afghan Government technical and negotiating capacity. End summary.

Water: Shared Resource, Shared Opportunity

[1](#)2. (C) All of Afghanistan's major river basins are internationally shared, but none are governed by trans-boundary rights agreements: a previous agreement with the USSR is no longer in force and a 1969 agreement with Iran is not observed by Tehran. Absent effective trans-boundary water agreements, few international donors will finance large-scale hydro-power projects. If handled well, trans-boundary water coordination could also strengthen diplomatic ties in the region as well as boost Afghanistan's economic well-being.

Afghan Officials Interested in Cooperation

[1](#)3. (C) Afghan officials are beginning to recognize the need for water-sharing agreements, partly because Afghanistan has now lost World Bank funding for two water infrastructure projects -- a water supply project on the border with Iran and a project on the Lower Kokcha near the border with Pakistan - due to GIROA unwillingness to notify affected downstream countries. Afghan National Assembly Member Najeebullah Kabuli recently gained press attention for leading a 300-person demonstration in Kabul urging the government to work on trans-boundary water policies, particularly relating to Iran and Pakistan. In addition, Ministry officials have begun requesting donor assistance, including advisors funded by USAID, to address water rights issues.

Donors Helping the Afghan Government Help Itself

[1](#)4. (C) There are important benefits to helping Afghanistan with trans-boundary water issues. Even smaller projects, such as irrigation dams, can affect downstream countries. Thus, depending on the respective project's environmental impact, proceeding even with such small projects would require Afghanistan having trans-boundary arrangements with its relevant neighbors.

[1](#)5. (C) The Kabul-based Water Sector Donors Group members -- including the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), the Canadian International Development Agency, the World

Bank, the European Commission, German Development Association, the U.S. Mission, and the British and Dutch Embassies -- are exploring ways to develop capacity within the Ministry of Energy and Water (MEW) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). USAID has placed a technical advisor in the Ministry of Energy and Water to coordinate donor efforts on trans-boundary capacity building and to work with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs under the Technical Secretariat of the Supreme Council for Water Affairs Management (SCWAM). The World Bank and USAID are hiring additional technical advisors to be embedded within the relevant ministries, while the British government is supporting a Regional Cooperation Unit within MFA. Through the United Nations Educational, Science and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), UNAMA brought in an expert to assess Afghan capacity for trans-boundary dialogue. The Dutch Embassy hosted a group Ministry of Energy and Water officials on a trip to Germany and the Netherlands to learn about the International Rhine Commission. In addition, the Dutch and the German Development Association have developed an "Afghan Study Tour" for the Afghan government on trans-boundary/riparian rights.

Afghan-Led Initiative

¶6. (C) On October 22, Minister of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock Mohammad Asif Rahimi wrote the Embassy to propose a coordination conference on Water Resources Development and the establishment of a working group including MAIL and Embassy counterparts. Minister Rahimi's proposal was inter-ministerial, but he did not list the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as a participating ministry. The Embassy and other donors will encourage Ministry of Foreign Affairs representation.

KABUL 00003639 002 OF 002

Acknowledgement Needed at Highest Level

¶7. (C) At a November 4 meeting of a subgroup of the Water Sector Donors Group, participants (including the World Bank, EU, UNAMA, and the Embassy) agreed to encourage the Afghan Government to acknowledge the need for water-sharing agreements with Afghanistan's neighbors. Some donors are lobbying for including an acknowledgement of the importance of water management issues in the region and a promise of dialogue/data sharing with Afghanistan's neighbors in President Karzai's inauguration address and in the proposed GIROA pledge to the Afghan people.

More Help Needed

¶8. (SBU) To promote transparency and information exchange, we should look at ways to help on funding and logistics for programs to bring Afghans and neighbors together on water rights. We understand SCA/RA is looking at the possibility of an Afghan-Central Asia program on water. We would be interested in working with Washington on this and other opportunities for regional training and outreach (ref B).

EIKENBERRY